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ABSTRACT

Violence and the fear of violence are taking an unacceptable toll on the lives and educations of young people in this country. The effects of violence on both individual students and on the learning environment can be devastating. The National Association of State Boards of Education Study Group framed recommendations for attacking this epidemic based on its belief that improving the school environment greatly enhances the safety of students, that schools must facilitate the formation of basic skills that enable young people to understand and resolve conflict nonviolently, and that schools must never give up on young people and their ability to learn. Three recommendations are that each state board should develop a state plan for dealing with violence among young people and its effect on teaching and learning; that state boards of education must protect the right of students and staff to feel safe and secure in a classroom as well as the right of children and youth to receive a public education; and that state plans should incorporate long-term strategies to prevent violence that include a focus on school climate and culture, such as cross-disciplinary instruction about violence, conflict resolution, and ethics. (Contains 31 references.) (RT)

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Schools Without Fear

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The Report of the NASBE Study Group on Violence and Its Impact on Schools and Learning

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October 1994

The National Association of State Boards of Education
Alexandria, Virginia

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PREFACE

NASBE's Study Group on Violence and Its Impact on Schools and Learning was commissioned in the fall of 1993 and charged with the formidable task of developing, over the course of a year, recommendations for education policymakers seeking ways to understand, cope with, and help prevent violence — violence that is seeping into America's classrooms and, equally as important, violence that threatens the lives of many students when they are outside of school in their neighborhoods, or even in their own homes. The following chapters are the result of many hours spent by the Study Group reviewing the literature on violence; listening to experts on violence involving young people, violence in schools, and conflict resolution; synthesizing federal, state, and local actions designed to prevent violence inside and outside of schools; and learning from the true experts — students and school staff — about their concerns for safety and the elements of safe schools.

Violence is defined by the Study Group as any condition or situation that creates actual or fear of physical, psychological, or emotional harm and therefore impedes learning. This broad definition encompasses a range of activities, from namecalling and harassment to assault and murder. The goal of the Study Group was to develop policy recommendations that foster healthy, supportive schools that are free from violence of any kind and that stimulate learning. Indeed, many schools are safe from the gun violence and other dangerous behaviors that have fueled a national hysteria over violence in schools, including schools in high crime neighborhoods. The epidemic of family and community violence has not spread into each and every school building. This does not, however, mean that there is not a pressing problem at hand. **Violence, whether it be inside or outside of schools, deadens the spirit, creates a nihilistic environment, and leads many young people to believe that their future is so bleak that education simply doesn't matter.**

Given the rash of statistics, the sometimes numbing accounts of violence in newspapers and on television, and the unforgettable stories told by individual students, it is easy to despair or reach for "quick fix" solutions. This will not do. As guardians for the education of all children, state boards, in concert with parents, other policymakers, and other agencies, must move quickly, yet thoughtfully and systemically, to ensure that schools are safe places that promote learning and a positive future for young people. We owe them — and our nation — nothing less.

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I. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Violence and the fear of violence are taking an unacceptable toll on the lives and educations of young people in this country. Countless newspaper and television stories, the results of student and teacher surveys, and the stories of young people themselves have been etched in the minds of education leaders and the public alike. The statistics can be overwhelming: forty percent of secondary students surveyed in a Louis Harris poll said that they knew someone who had been killed or injured by a gun. Fifteen percent reported that they had carried a gun during the previous thirty days. The number of young people under age 18 arrested for violent offenses increased 50 percent between 1987 and 1991. Statistically, children are far safer on the streets of Northern Ireland than they are on the streets of America.

Nor are the headline-grabbing acts of violence the only concern. So-called "lesser" forms of violence, ranging from bullying and fist fights to name-calling and many forms of harassment, are also widespread in and near schools. For example, one widely-publicized 1993 survey commissioned by the American Association of University Women (AAUW) reported that 76 percent of boys and 85 percent of girls said they had experienced sexual harassment; many of these had been victimized, mostly by fellow students, with alarming frequency.

The effects of violence on both individual students and on the learning environment can be devastating. Those who are victims of violence, or witness violent acts, or live in fear of being victimized can suffer an array of consequences ranging from an inability to concentrate to dropping out of school. The AAUW survey cited above found that nearly 25 percent of high school girls had skipped school or cut classes because of sexual harassment alone. Another survey found that 16 percent of all New York City students had stayed home from school out of fear of violence. But the future for those young people who give in to the culture of violence through gang or other activities is far bleaker, frequently ending in a violent death, prison, or a life of poverty with few chances for escape. These are acute concerns that have already caught the attention of state boards of education, civic leaders, parents, and educators.

Yet violence is a multifaceted problem that is related to a number of complex, deep-rooted societal conditions, including poverty, racism, joblessness, and hopelessness. Accordingly, NASBE's Study Group on Violence and Its Impact on Schools and Learning strongly urges education leaders and other policymakers not to give in to calls for "fast track" legislation that may provide money for metal detectors or put some delinquent students out on the street, but do little to change the environments that breed violent behaviors. **This epidemic must be attacked on many fronts**, using a creative balance of preventive as well as punitive strategies that target the individual, the home, the school, and the community. Families must be strengthened, economic opportunities must be made available, and children must be taught alternative solutions to resolving conflicts. Obviously, educators **by themselves** cannot rid schools and their surrounding neighborhoods of violence. A community problem necessitates community-wide solutions. What has been coined "school violence" is nothing more than societal violence that has penetrated the schoolhouse walls. But the role of the school, by way of its climate and curriculum, is indeed a critical one.

In framing its recommendations, the Study Group based its deliberations on the following three assumptions:

- The Study Group believes that **improving the school environment greatly enhances the safety of students** from a wide range of violent behaviors that include acts of namecalling, harassment, and bullying that are pervasive even in so-called "safe schools." In fact, some restructuring efforts may

actually defend against violence by creating a climate that is both supportive to students and staff as well as disciplined. In such an environment, young people are valued for their own unique worth, and mutual respect is shown (and expected) among students, teachers, and staff. Schools that are dealing with conflict and violence in a sustained, holistic manner are not just safer schools — they are better, more effective schools because they enhance children's opportunities to learn. Indeed, central to this report is our belief that the best deterrence to violence in schools is a challenging and engaging curriculum taught by committed and well-trained professionals.

- The Study Group believes that in order to support the healthy development of children and youth, **schools must facilitate the formation of basic skills that enable young people to understand and resolve conflict non-violently**. Emotional and social competencies should be integrated into curricular frameworks. Commonly-held values that are nurtured in young people, such as respect for one's self and others as well as responsibility for one's actions, should be reinforced by the school. Conflict resolution and peer mediation programs based on available research that are comprehensive in scope, rather than add-ons to the curriculum, are also valuable intervention tools.

- Finally, the Study Group believes that **schools must never give up on young people and their ability to learn**. Clearly, ridding schools of disruptive and delinquent students does not, in fact, prevent violence; in reality, it only transfers the problem from one setting to another. Rather than relying on expulsion, education leaders should consider academic achievement as an effective solution to the current epidemic. Our society can no longer afford to take educational opportunities away from children and youth by placing further obstacles along the path to a productive future.

With the help of families and communities nationwide, safe and supportive schools free from a continuum of violence can indeed be a reality. To this end, state boards of education must provide leadership in assuring that violence or the fear of violence deprives neither children of a meaningful education nor teachers of their ability to foster learning. In an effort to assist state boards to advance learning through the prevention of violent behavior, the NASBE Study Group on Violence and Its Impact on Schools and Learning makes the following recommendations:

RECOMMENDATION 1. Each state board should develop a state plan for dealing with violence among young people and its effect on teaching and learning. As part of the plan, the state board should work with a variety of stakeholders to assess the extent of the impact of violence on young people in their state, as well as develop and support appropriate policies and programs that effectively respond to the problem.

RECOMMENDATION 2. State boards of education must protect the right of students and staff to feel safe and secure in a classroom as well as the right of children and youth to receive a public education. To do so, state boards must assure that a continuum of sanctions is available for children and youth who have been disruptive or delinquent. Expulsion without alternatives is not a solution to youth violence. Efforts must be made to keep disruptive or delinquent students, to the maximum extent possible, in their neighborhood school. At a minimum, alternative programs with strong academic and counseling components should be provided.

RECOMMENDATION 3. State plans should incorporate long-term strategies to prevent violence that include a focus on school climate and culture; cross-disciplinary instruction about violence, conflict resolution, and ethics; and intervention programs such as peer mediation, mentoring, and counseling services. Only by thoughtfully balancing prevention and intervention measures can educators truly reduce the amount of violence and make a positive impact on the learning environment.

II. YOUNG PEOPLE AND VIOLENCE

Today millions of American children, youth, and adults no longer feel safe. One need only review recent news accounts detailing yet another robbery and murder at a convenience store or car highjacking or drive-by shooting to realize that a culture of violence has ravaged countless neighborhoods and communities from coast to coast. Homicide rates as well as non-fatal violent victimizations in this country are among the highest in the world. Fights, riots, the abuse and neglect of children, hate crimes, and domestic violence have become all too commonplace, affecting people in every region of the country.

But while the statistics are staggering, they in no way fully measure the enormous impact, both socially and economically, that violence has on our nation. Frequently neglected are the many violent incidents that go unreported, including violence in the home, violence among acquaintances, harassment, violence against young children, and physical fighting among friends. Finally, there is the impact of the real and perceived threat of violent crime that has gripped much of America, affecting young and old alike. Put together, the effects of this epidemic over the last decade run deep, extending far beyond victims and perpetrators and into their families, neighborhoods, and communities. And ironically, while most Americans deplore the violence that is so prevalent in today's society, our overexposure to it via the media and the entertainment industry has made it more or less tolerated. Have we become desensitized to violent behavior? Has its prevalence lessened our outrage? Has violence become an acceptable part of our culture?

Yet of all the questions about violence and crime that Americans ask, perhaps the most disturbing is, **Why is this happening to our young people?** Why are so many young people bringing weapons to school? Why have juvenile arrest rates for violent crime risen so sharply? Why are teenagers far more likely to be victims of violent crime than middle-aged adults? Why have so many gangs appeared, not just in big cities, but in smaller communities across the nation? Why do children shoot each other over athletic shoes? The numbers presented on these pages provide a sobering portrait of troubled times for millions of young people. Such numbers have caused many Americans to ask themselves the hardest questions of all: Have we lost control of our children? How can we help them?

In order to help policymakers, educators, and parents answer this last question, this chapter will briefly review some of the current knowledge about violence, the causes and extent of violent behavior in and around schools, and some of the debilitating effects violence has on the ability of young people to learn and pursue their education.

What Causes Violence?

What do we know about violence?

- that violence has always been part of our culture;
- that violent behavior takes on different forms, including child abuse, domestic violence, hate crimes, gang aggression, and sexual violence, among others;
- that patterns of violence can vary from neighborhood to neighborhood, school to school, and community to community;
- that violence can be interpersonal or, as in the case of suicide, directed at one's self;
- that everyone is at risk of encountering violence;
- that certain factors may increase one's risk of violence;

- that violent behavior is most often learned, from encountering or witnessing violence in the home, on the streets, or on television; and **most importantly,**
- that most violence is preventable.

It has been suggested throughout history that poverty is the root of all crime, and indeed, socioeconomics and other inequities are thought to be forces related to the epidemic of violence in our society. In addition, weakened families, neighborhoods, and community networks are also believed to be associated with violent behavior. But in reality, the experts do not fully understand why people behave violently — why a parent beats a child; why a husband strikes his wife; or what motivates someone to gun down another human being. Youth violence, like other types of violence, is a complex subject that is difficult to comprehend.

While there are no easy explanations, much attention has been focused on the many risk factors and patterns of behavior thought to underlie the current epidemic. These factors associated with violent behavior are both intricate and often interrelated, and include such societal ills as poverty, joblessness, hopelessness, and prejudice. Additional related variables impacting the lives of young people include unhealthy families; drug and alcohol abuse; access to drugs, guns, and other weapons; past victimization; and neighborhoods plagued by crime.

Many researchers feel that abuse and neglect also put children at higher risk of becoming delinquent later in life. Others have suggested that involvement in gangs; the influence of peers (pressure not to back away from potential conflict, for example, or pressure to carry a weapon); excessive discipline; inadequate supervision; perceived lack of meaningful economic, recreational, and educational opportunity; past aggression; an inability to control anger, conflict, and frustration nonviolently; adolescent tendencies to live life "on the edge"; and the condition of one's family and neighborhood contribute in some measure to our nation's chronic youth violence problem.

Finally, even conditions at school can influence young people to become disruptive or delinquent. Specifically, poor school performance can increase a child's propensity towards delinquency. The ability of a school to engage all students in meaningful learning is therefore critical to preventing violence. School and classroom management practices might also inadvertently increase the risk of violence among some students. **The climate of the school, which includes a number of factors ranging from its physical structure to instructional approaches, is therefore also critical to creating a safe and supportive environment where meaningful learning takes place.**

It is clear then, that individual factors, as well as family, school, and community considerations, can put children and youth at risk of violence. No particular factor, however, predisposes a young person to a life marred by violence, nor do all people exposed to such risks resort to violence. Many young people, in fact, prove exceptionally resilient to the factors that may put others at risk. Finally, behaviors that are subject to effective interventions can indeed be modified.

Violence Involving Young People

Youth as Offenders

Children are said to be a reflection of the society in which they live. It should not be surprising, then, that increasing numbers of young people are involved in violence in one way or another, as victims or as perpetrators. Much attention at the national, state, and local levels has been given to youth violence, and with good reason. Violence involving our nation's young people has become an all too familiar phenomenon.

During the last few years the number of violent crimes committed by school-aged youth has spiraled to frightening proportions. According to the U.S. Department of Justice, for instance, the number of people under age 18 arrested for violent offenses increased by 50 percent between 1987 and

1991. Arrest rates of juveniles accused of murder rose a staggering 85 percent during this same period. And although estimates of the use of weapons among young people vary, the U.S. Department of Justice reports (in its 1994 report, *Firearms and Crimes of Violence*) that our younger generation is also disproportionately affected by crimes involving handguns. Still, only a small number of high risk youth are responsible for most serious juvenile offenses, according the U.S. Department of Justice.

While media attention often focuses on children and guns, it remains unclear how many young people regularly carry weapons either inside or outside of school settings. Several studies estimate that as many as one-quarter of our nation's high school students carry a weapon on a regular basis. Over one-quarter of the high school students who participated in the Center for Disease Control and Prevention's Youth Risk Behavior Survey in 1991 reportedly carried a weapon, gun or otherwise, during the month before the survey. Fifteen percent of sixth to twelfth grade students responding to a 1993 Louis Harris poll indicated that they had carried a gun during the previous thirty days. Equally disturbing, almost 40 percent of those surveyed by Louis Harris and Associates claimed to know someone who had either been injured or killed by a gun. Finally, eleven percent of the students polled said they had been shot at during the past year, while nine percent reported having previously shot at someone else.

Young people might carry a weapon for a variety of reasons — peer pressure to do so, to protect themselves, as a symbol of power or status, or to threaten or harm others. Weapons found inside schools should sound a warning to us all that knives, and increasingly guns, are too readily available to children and youth.

Gangs are often cited as a growing problem for many communities — urban, suburban, small town, and rural. Since schools are social places where diverse groups of young people regularly cluster, the potential for gang aggression in and

Youth Arrest and Victimization Rates

Youth Offending

- In 1991, 17% of all people arrested for violent crimes were juveniles. An estimated 3,400 young people were arrested for murder; 6,300 juvenile arrests were made for forcible rape; 44,500 were arrested for robbery; and 68,700 juvenile arrests were made for aggravated assault.

- In 1991, 1 out of 5 people arrested for weapons violations were under 18.

Youth Victimization

- At least 2,200 young people were murdered during 1991. Over 80% of homicide victims aged 15 to 19 were murdered with a gun. In addition, over 2000 teenagers (mostly white males) committed suicide.

- Each year, approximately 67 out of every 1,000 teenagers were victims of violent crime during the period between 1985 and 1988. By contrast, the victimization rate for adults over age 20 during this same period was significantly less — 26 out of 1,000.

Child Abuse and Neglect

- In 1991, approximately 2.7 million children were reportedly neglected or physically abused. Many researchers believe that young people who have been physically abused are at much higher risk of being violent themselves. Statistically, children who were abused were twice as likely to be seriously delinquent and twice as likely to be arrested as though who were not maltreated. Further, the effects of abuse were independent of the effects of poverty or family structure.

Source: Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention. Juveniles and Violence: Juvenile Offending and Victimization. Fact Sheet #3, July 1993.

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around schools should not be taken lightly. Although there are no national estimates of gang-related violence, many say that gangs are more brutal than they have been in years past. Furthermore, younger and younger children are believed to be joining gangs, long thought to provide young people with excitement, a sense of belonging, and in some cases even money. Finally, although gangs have been traditionally dominated by young men, gang-related activity among females is also thought to be on the rise.

Equally disturbing is the prevalence of non-gang related physical fights among young people. Nationally, forty-three percent of the high school students who responded to the 1991 Youth Risk Behavior Survey indicated that they had been in a physical fight during the previous year — and today, fights all too frequently escalate to the use of deadly weapons. Many people are also concerned with what is commonly referred to as hate crimes, in which harm or the threat of harm is perpetrated against another because of prejudice against an aspect of that person's culture.

Youth as Victims

Young offenders are not the only problem facing educators and others concerned with youth violence. Statistics indicate that child abuse, as well as other victimization rates of young people in areas ranging from violent crime to sexual harassment, have also been on the rise. Indeed, data from recent National Crime Victimization Surveys indicate that contrary to popular belief, teenagers are far more likely to be victims of violence than older Americans (see box on page 8).

These trends in juvenile offending and victimization are indeed disturbing. No wonder, then, that violence in society, and in particular violence involving young people, continues to attract widespread public attention. The impact of violence on families, neighborhoods, and communities is sweeping and dramatic, and extends to the social institutions that serve these communities — including public schools.

Prevalence of Violence in Schools

While most schools are relatively free from serious violent behavior, including high profile crimes involving firearms, no school is immune. The U.S. Department of Education reports that between 1986 and 1990, 71 people were killed at school by guns. With many children and youth at risk of either developing violent tendencies or becoming a victim of violence, and an alarming number of teachers reporting attacks and threats of physical harm, schools cannot disregard societal violence and its impact on the ability of students and teachers to partake in a quality education program. The fear of violence at or near schools is also a serious problem affecting students and school staff that should not be overlooked.

Because of a lack of uniformity in reporting mechanisms — and because countless acts of drug use, weapons possession, and lesser acts of violence simply go undetected or unreported by teachers and staff — most national estimates of the incidence of violence in schools are based on surveys of students and teachers rather than on reported incidents. One *New York Times*/CBS News poll revealed that significant numbers of students feel that violence is indeed a problem inside school. Nineteen percent of white teenagers and thirty-seven percent of African American students indicated that violence, in fact, was the biggest problem at their school. Surveys have shown that teachers generally feel safer in school than students. For example, 77 percent of the teachers participating in the *Metropolitan Life Survey of the American Teacher 1993: Violence in America's Public Schools* indicated that they feel "very safe" at or near school. Yet in this same survey, **only half** of the student respondents reported feeling "very safe" in school, and 23 percent of the students polled said they had been victimized by violence either inside or near their school.

Another research tool often referred to is the School Crime Supplement to the National Crime Victimization Survey. This 1989 survey of twelve to nineteen year olds showed that approximately nine percent of the respondents had been victims of crime

at or near their schools during the previous six months. Of the nine percent, two percent said they had been victimized by violent crime, while seven percent had been victims of at least one property crime, such as theft. Six percent of the students said that there were places in or near their school that they avoided because they were afraid they would be victimized. Fifteen percent of the students surveyed said that gangs were present in their school. And reports of student attacks on or threats towards teachers were indicated by sixteen percent of the student respondents.

Sexual harassment of and by students is another category of violence that, while not always included with other forms of physical violence, has similar implications for schools. Sexual harassment can range from namecalling or sexual comments to unwelcome touching, being grabbed, or being forced to kiss or do something sexual other than kissing. It is surprisingly common in schools, with both girls and boys being frequent victims of harassment. The American Association of University Women (AAUW) Survey on Sexual Harassment in America's Schools (8th to 11th grade), conducted by Louis Harris and Associates, found that 76 percent of the boys and 85 percent of the girls reported being harassed, with close to 25 percent being harassed "often." The connection between sexual harassment and school safety is very real. As one high school girl who had experienced harassment wrote: "The experience was unnerving. I was rattled. I felt insecure and vulnerable at school, which should be a safe place for learning."

Protective Factors and Resiliency

Many children exposed to factors that put them at risk of a number of problems, including delinquency, drug and alcohol abuse, and school failure, nonetheless avoid these problems and develop into healthy and productive adults. In recent decades, researchers trying to learn why some children are more resilient than others have studied numerous cohorts of children in an attempt to identify so-called "protective factors," or those conditions that foster resiliency in young people despite the negative odds they face.

A resilient child has been described as one who is socially competent, self-efficacious, and an effective problem-solver who is able to negotiate through a web of adversity. Longitudinal studies of resilient children indicate that the following protective factors, present in the family, school, and community, serve as a buffer against those variables that put that child at risk of unhealthy behavior such as violence:

- a positive, caring relationship with an adult;
- high expectations for behavior and abilities; and
- opportunities for meaningful participation and involvement.

Though many risk and protective factors exist outside of school, resiliency research supports the notion that effective schools can enhance protective factors in students, thereby reducing the risks they may be exposed to at home and in their communities. Such schools offer students an environment that fosters caring and supportive relationships with teachers, school personnel, and classmates. High expectations are held for all children and youth, who are given the support they need to meet such standards. And students are encouraged to be involved in school and extracurricular activities. These three factors, which foster a bond between child and school, are key ingredients to the healthy social and emotional development of all children, particularly those at increased risk of violence and other social problems.

Source: Bonnie Benard, "Fostering Resiliency in Kids: Protective Factors in the Family, School, and Community." *Prevention Forum*, Summer 1992.

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The Impact of Violence on Young People and Their Education

Unfortunately, there is much more to the epidemic of violence in our society than simple statistics. Numbers don't capture the crushing impact that violence has on individuals, families, schools, communities, and our nation as a whole. Every facet of one's life is affected when violence is experienced, whether one is a victim or a witness.

For victims, the impact can be physical, social, emotional, and even financial. Becoming a victim of violence may generate feelings of anger, sadness, fear, guilt, depression, and distrust, as well as physical and emotional effects. In extreme cases, children in crime-ridden communities who have been repeatedly exposed to violence can even suffer post-traumatic stress disorder. Other children may not be allowed out of the house to play. Indeed, the fear of violence in many neighborhoods and communities is giving rise to a generation of young people who, in order to assure their safety, are kept indoors, isolated from their peers. In the worst cases, our violent society leads some young people to anticipate an early mortality. Indeed, some Washington, D.C. youth have reportedly prepared for an early death by planning their own funerals.

The effect that experiencing or witnessing violence can have on a child's overall development naturally extends into the classroom. Cognitively speaking, children living in fear may have trouble paying attention, concentrating, and learning. Socially, the stress of being a victim, or of witnessing acts of violence, may make it more difficult for children and youth to relate to others in the classroom — and they may also become disruptive or even aggressive. In some cases they may withdraw from the classroom experience entirely. Psychologically, children that experience violence may develop problem behaviors, or they may regress in an attempt to cope with the insufferable events around them. This, in turn, can interfere with their healthy growth and development. In short, the trauma of being victimized, or of seeing a loved one harmed by violence, inevitably affects a child's behavior in the classroom as well as his or her ability to learn.

Sadly, as shown earlier, victimization rates of young people are disturbingly high and scores of students have been exposed to violence in one way or another. An astonishing forty percent of thirteen- to seventeen-year-old respondents to the *New York Times*/CBS poll cited above indicated that they knew someone who had been shot during the past five years. And so regardless of the extent of violence actually occurring inside schools, many students live and learn in fear of the violence that is plaguing so many neighborhoods and communities.

When it does occur, violence inside schools can be particularly trying for students, teachers, and school personnel. Violent or disruptive behavior can not only destroy a positive learning environment in a classroom, it can negatively affect the ambiance of an entire school. Fear inhibits the ability of teachers to teach and students to learn. Fear of harm can also affect school attendance, for parents might keep children home from school in order to assure their safety. Furthermore, young people may decide to stop going to school altogether if they fear for their personal safety inside school. Nine percent of all middle and high school respondents to a New York statewide survey, and 16 percent of New York City students, said that such fear led them to miss school during the previous year.

The AAUW study cited above also explored the educational impact of sexual harassment on students. The survey found that students who had been victims of sexual harassment reported a disturbing number of detrimental effects: nearly a quarter of the girls said they had actually stayed home from school or cut classes because of the incidents; nearly as many said the experience had made it hard to study, and nearly thirty percent said this had made it hard to pay attention in school.

In addition to academic losses, the fear of violence also threatens extracurricular and other social activities, which may be reduced by schools in an effort to prevent violence in or around campuses,

The Role of Media/Entertainment

Television and other media violence are frequently blamed for today's epidemic of violence. The American Psychological Association's report *Violence and Youth: Psychology's Response* looked at a number of national studies and concluded that "there is absolutely no doubt that higher levels of viewing violence on television are correlated with increased acceptance of aggressive attitudes and increased aggressive behavior." Many believe that the absence of pain, grief, remorse, and consequences for violence seen on television and in movies or heard in music sends the wrong message — that violence is an acceptable way to solve their problems and that violence is symbolic of power. Moreover, the brutality that saturates many of the best-selling movies and video games is seen as unhealthy for young people and even dangerous. Finally, analysis of TV programming points to another disturbing angle — that women and people of color are disproportionately portrayed as victims, while powerful men are more often the killers. The many research studies that have found a correlation between violence on television and aggressiveness among young people back up some of these contentions.

Another concern is that media violence intensifies the fear of victimization that has become a daily part of life for many people. In other words, increased exposure to media reports of violence, as well as the violence in movies and music and on TV, may generate excess anxiety in children, or attitudes toward violence that lack sensitivity and empathy. Given the prevalence of television, movies, and music in our society, it is no wonder that schools are increasingly being called on to teach media literacy to our nation's young people.

Others argue, however, that blaming Hollywood and the media is nothing more than scapegoating, and that such arguments are ill informed about the deep-rooted origins that lead someone to behave violently. Still others may fear censorship of what is perceived to be inappropriate. For now, despite the available research, the debate continues.

Yet it is important to keep in mind that many children will spend as much or more time in front of the television than they will ever spend in a classroom. For example, twenty-five percent of the student respondents to the 1993 Metropolitan Life Survey on school violence said that they watched four or more hours of television, even on school days. The potential for television to influence children's behavior, either positively or negatively, is therefore significant.

or which students fearful of violence may simply avoid. For example, one middle school student from a Maryland suburb told the Study Group he had stopped going to school-sponsored dances because of the growing number of fights and tensions at these events.

Finally, the devastating effects of violence on the educations and future lives of those young people who resort to such behavior cannot be ignored. Suspensions and expulsions can easily lead such students to drop out entirely in favor of life on the street. While precise numbers are difficult to obtain due to lack of reporting requirements, it is known that dropout rates in some districts still range between 25 and 50 percent, leaving hundreds of thousands of young people without educations or resources — or much hope for a better life. It is in just such circumstances that violence and crime flourish, costing the nation billions of dollars in law enforcement, prison construction, and lost productivity. And as homicides have become the leading cause of death for men aged 18-36 (and the third leading cause of death for schoolchildren aged 5-14!) many will pay the ultimate price, and thousands of families will needlessly suffer the grief of losing loved ones at far, far too young an age.

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III. State Board of Education Leadership

Each state board should develop a state plan for dealing with violence among young people and its effect on teaching and learning. As part of the plan, the state board should work with a variety of stakeholders to assess the extent of the impact of violence on young people in their state as well as develop and support appropriate policies and programs that effectively respond to the problem.

The traditional response to violence in this country has come from the criminal justice system. Yet as rates of violence among young people have risen over the years, it has become increasingly clear that a multidisciplinary approach that includes education is needed to address this complex problem. While the root causes and effects of violence extend far beyond the schoolhouse doors, the potential for public education to reduce and prevent violence should not be understated. By virtue of their mission, state boards of education clearly have an opportunity to positively impact the future of children and youth by creating safe and supportive schools full of hope and promise, and where meaningful learning takes place. Furthermore, as policymakers and advocates for children, state boards are well-positioned to shield young people from violence by reducing some of the factors that put children at risk of violence later in life.

The core of the state board response should be the development of a state plan for dealing with violence among young people. Recognizing the critical role that a solid and engaging educational program in each school plays in reducing violence, such a plan may be part of the state's overall education reform package, or it may stand alone while being closely tied to the larger plan. However it is structured, it should include the following elements:

- a definition of violence in schools;
- a plan for assessing the extent and nature of the problem in the state;
- a strategy for collaborating with other agencies and organizations;
- assistance to local districts and schools in the development of their own violence prevention plans and strategies; and
- means for monitoring state progress in reducing violence among young people.

A Critical Assessment of the Problem

A basic first step for state leaders addressing violence and its impact on schools and learning is to assess the extent and nature of the problem. This will involve developing a definition of what the state means by violence, followed by a statewide look at the epidemiology of violence involving young people. Epidemiology is a field of medical science that surveys the incidence, pervasiveness, and control of health problems affecting the population. Violence, in fact, is now perceived as a public health problem because of its significant impact on morbidity and mortality rates.

An understanding of the factors that put children and youth at risk of violence is critical to a thorough assessment of the problem. Because state boards are concerned with the impact of violence on learning, their assessment must examine violence by and upon young people both inside and outside of school. An understanding of patterns of violence in school is essential, but it is not sufficient. As discussed earlier in this report, the factors that increase one's propensity toward violence are often complicated matters stemming from the home, the childcare or school setting, the neighborhood, and the community. State boards should therefore involve a wide range of stakeholders to ensure that assessments estimate violence involving young

people in all environments. Only then will boards have a complete picture of violence and young people, the risk factors involved, and the impact on students and their ability to learn.

Collaboration with health and human service agencies, law enforcement, juvenile justice and other youth-serving organizations will therefore be useful — even necessary — to state boards of education as they come to understand the patterns of violent behavior. Only then can boards develop and support appropriate prevention and intervention strategies. Armed with an understanding of young people in their state who are victims and perpetrators, policymakers will be better able to design strategies that specifically address their risks and behaviors.

Reporting Requirements

Some states have little information about how violence has impacted their public schools and how the schools have responded. This is because of the variance in reporting requirements among local districts and states. Some, though not many, states require districts to report violence in schools to a central location such as the state education agency. Even if reporting is required, however, differences in the way districts define violence in school may interfere with a general assessment of the problem. **The Study Group defined violence as any condition or situation that creates actual or fear of physical, psychological, or emotional harm and therefore impedes learning.** Namecalling, harassment, and bullying constitute violent behavior under this definition. It is important, however, that each state board develop its own criteria that defines violence in school, especially if they plan to require local districts to report such incidents to the state.

Critics of state reporting requirements may be concerned with implementation costs. Others may worry that reports might be sensationalized and that negative attention might be focused on schools where violent events have taken place. The latter is indeed a very real concern. After all, the last thing most schools would want is a report card chastising them because of reported incidents. State boards of education, therefore, should take steps to remove the stigma attached to schools and districts that report incidences of violence. Rather than being punished by the negativity that might follow such reporting, these districts should be provided with support and assistance. The purpose of statewide reporting is to assess the extent and nature of violent behavior inside schools. The stigma attached to reporting incidences, left unchecked, can become a barrier to compliance with such a requirement. And if districts do not uniformly report incidences of violence in accordance with the state's definition, any assessment of the problem will be incomplete. Data regarding the nature of violence in school settings will be neither valid nor reliable.

> The biggest obstacle that we all faced in preparing reports on this topic for the State Board was the lack of consolidated information on the nature of the problem of school misconduct and crime in the state... Information is needed from the LEAs, from local school board members, central administrators, school building administrators of elementary, middle and senior high schools, and teachers. Those involved in both law enforcement and the judicial system need to be involved as well as representatives of other state and community agencies that address the problems of children such as public health, mental health and social services. Parents are a key component as well as members of the community.
>
> *Creating Safe Environments for Learning in North Carolina's Public Schools*, North Carolina Educational Policy Research Center

Indeed, better systems for measuring violence in schools are needed in order to design effective programs to prevent and reduce such behavior. Substantive information about the violent events as well as the perpetrators will provide state policymakers with a better understanding of the

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sources of the problem — namely, the factors that put students in their state at risk of various types of violence. Prevention and intervention efforts can then be designed to reduce these risks.

Assisting Local Districts and Schools

Part of the state plan should include assistance to local districts and schools in the development of their individual plans for responding to school violence. Such support can come in the form of resources (such as grants for specific projects or programs) or technical assistance (development of model school plans or policies). For their part, **state boards of education and state education agencies should serve as a resource for model safe schools programs, policies, and plans that foster safe and supportive schools that enhance learning.**

Providing such a service will not always be easy, however. While an abundance of information on how to reduce violence in schools is readily available, including a multitude of educational programs that have recently flooded the market, not all such programs have undergone rigorous evaluation. Many programs are still fairly new. Others may have been evaluated, but not longitudinally. Clearly, more research is needed before we can conclusively say which strategies will work where and why. For the present, then, it is especially important that "BUYERS BEWARE!" Programs that seem promising on paper may not be proven effective in the classroom. Furthermore, a program that is effective in one setting may not be effective in another.

States may wish to help further the research base by providing resources for model programs and requiring vigorous evaluations as part of the grant. In the meantime, state boards and other educators who are forced to pick and choose among a number of alternative programs and strategies should keep in mind the following themes:

- A comprehensive prevention program should include multiple interventions that are woven into the entire fabric of the school. For the best results, classroom-based initiatives should not be implemented in isolation of other interventions; rather, they should be part of a school-wide program that includes a focus on school climate, school discipline, and conflict resolution and mediation.

- A systemic approach that is linked to and supported by the community is essential to the long-term prevention of violence involving young people. School-based prevention and intervention programs that are adopted without sufficient assessment, testing, and evaluation are often criticized as quick fix responses. Unfortunately, there is no simple solution to this problem.

- Prevention strategies should address the factors that put young people at risk of violence, as well as protective factors that foster resiliency. They should do so, moreover, in a manner that is both developmentally and culturally appropriate.

- The goals of any prevention program or plan should build on the educational mission and goals of the state, district, or school.

- Strategies should be based on current research regarding effective prevention and intervention.

Unfortunately, the Study Group acknowledges that even the highest quality educational programs alone are not enough to win this battle. Such programs are only one of a number of necessary components of a community-wide plan to combat this epidemic. School-based interventions need to be reinforced by prevention efforts aimed at home, neighborhood, and community, and other youth-serving organizations and agencies, in addition to students themselves and their families. Collaboration at all levels is critical. At the state level, state boards of education can model cooperation and collaboration while ensuring broad-based participation and dialogue. Through policies, and more importantly process, they can serve as a bridge between public education and the larger community.

Integrating Violence Prevention into State Plans under Goals 2000

Because of the far-reaching effects that violence has on teaching and learning, the question of how to reduce and prevent violence should be included in state education reform plans. During the next several years, many states will be using funds available under the *Goals 2000: Educate America Act* to develop or build upon state education reform efforts. (Goal Six states that "By the year 2000, every school in America will be free of drugs and violence and will offer a disciplined environment conducive for learning.") States that choose to participate in Goals 2000 must submit a state education improvement plan that includes content and performance standards, assessments, and opportunity-to-learn standards or strategies.

Congress gave tremendous flexibility to states, allowing each state to define the term "opportunity to learn" based on the criteria it deems appropriate and in the form either of standards or strategies. (The implementation of the standard or strategy is purely voluntary at the state and local levels.) Because the concept of opportunity to learn is undefined and somewhat amorphous, limited only by how it will help students meet content and performance standards, a state's opportunity-to-learn standards may stretch beyond traditional notions of teaching and learning.

Given this flexibility, school safety is an appropriate issue for states to address as they develop opportunity-to-learn standards or strategies. The National Education Standards and Improvement Council will certify voluntary national opportunity-to-learn standards based on a number of criteria stated in the law. One of the elements the Council will use is "the extent to which school facilities provide a safe and secure environment for learning and instruction...."

Although states are not required to consider the same elements for opportunity-to-learn standards or strategies as the Council, the listed elements do provide guideposts for the wide range of areas that states may deem appropriate opportunity-to-learn criteria for their students. The safety and security of students and school staff should be considered a key element of a child's opportunity to maximize learning at school, and in many schools is no less important to learning than the quality of the instructional materials.

Checklist for Action

- ✓ **Collaboration and cooperation with federal, state, and local agencies, organizations, and stakeholders should be fostered by state boards of education as part of an assessment of and response to violence involving children and youth in their state.**
- ✓ **The state board should utilize its position to raise awareness among lawmakers about the serious impact of violence on the state's public schools and the actions that must be taken to help stem this epidemic.**
- ✓ **State boards should ensure that their violence prevention plan is consistent with and integrated into the state's overall education reform plan.**
- ✓ **State boards should serve as a resource for model safe schools policies and plans as well as prevention and intervention programs that have been evaluated and proven effective.**
- ✓ **State boards should challenge political leaders at all levels to provide the resources and the leadership that is needed to respond to this emergency.**

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Federal Initiatives

The Administration and the 103rd Congress focused an unusual amount of attention on violence as it affects children, youth and schools. While everyone has decried the rise of violence by and against children and youth, the proposed prevention solutions have not always engendered widespread bipartisan support. The major federal legislation recently enacted on violence and schools consists of:

- The Safe Schools Act, a one-year program of $20 million that provides competitive grants to local school districts to conduct a variety of prevention programs such as conflict resolution, peer mediation, hiring security guards and installing metal detectors.

- The Safe and Drug Free Schools and Communities Act, which will be the renamed version of the Drug Free School and Communities Act, reauthorized in 1994. The new Act will require state and local school districts to take a comprehensive and integrated approach to violence prevention.

- The Omnibus Crime Act of 1994, which balances prevention with punishment. After heated debate, several of the youth prevention programs were retained in the enacted legislation. For example, the Act creates an interagency Ounce of Prevention Council to coordinate crime prevention programs; Community Schools for after-school, summer and weekend programs for children and youth; school-based education, mentoring and other programs for at-risk children; and a block grant of local crime prevention activities distributed to local governments for programs that may include schools.

- The Gun Free Schools amendment to the Elementary and Secondary Education Act, enacted March 31, 1994, which mandates that all school districts have a policy of expelling a student who brings a gun to school for a minimum of one year or forfeit federal funds. The chief officer of the district may waive the rule on a case-by-case basis — language that is primarily intended to protect the "stay put" provision in the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act.[1]

[1] The Gun Free Schools amendment will sunset unless it is included in the reauthorization bill that will be enacted by the end of the 103rd Congress. A proposal in the House reauthorization bill would change the provision so that districts are required to have a policy dealing with students who bring weapons to school, but which does not dictate the content of the district's policy. The U.S. Department of Education, at this time, has not issued regulations on the Gun Free Schools provision.

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IV. Responding to Violence and Disruptive Behavior in Schools

State boards of education must protect the right of students and staff to feel safe and secure in a classroom, as well as the right of children and youth to receive a public education. To do so, state boards must assure that a continuum of sanctions is available for children and youth who have been disruptive or delinquent. Efforts must be made to keep such children, to the extent possible, in their neighborhood school.

Expulsion

Education leaders are naturally frightened by the increasing prospect of violence in schools — and the far-reaching effects that violence and disruptive behavior can have on teachers and students should not be understated. Yet the Study Group is concerned that in some instances, the widespread fear among educators is overriding the educational opportunities of some children and youth. Indeed, public anxiety about violence involving youth is at an all time high, and the mounting pressure for school safety has culminated in an unsettling trend: ***many young people are being expelled from public schools without alternative educational programs in place for them***. As advocates for all children, state boards of education should be vocal against the excessive use of expulsion, reserving such disciplinary actions only for those cases where it is absolutely necessary: for serious and chronic violent offenders. Moreover, board members should oppose legislation linking federal funds to expulsion mandates that do not provide resources for alternative educational programs.

Visionary and creative leadership among state boards is critical to protecting the rights and safety of all students and school staff. While any student or staff member who threatens the safety of others should be removed from a classroom, as appropriate, such students must continue to be provided with a quality education that includes conflict resolution, appropriate psychosocial services, and plans for reintegration into the neighborhood school. Intervention and deterrence should be individualized and student-centered. State boards of education must therefore ensure that a continuum of consequences is available for children and youth who have behaved violently or are disruptive, and that to the maximum extent possible efforts are made to keep such a child in the neighborhood school.

Board members should be proactive in the development of viable alternatives to expulsion so that children and youth who have had discipline problems can remain in their regular school if possible. Such efforts are essential, because in many cases the structure and support of the classroom may be one of the only positive paths toward success available to such children. The focus on academic achievement and personal growth that is provided by a good school can have a positive impact on behavior. Furthermore, in some situations there is no alternative educational program available to children and youth who have been expelled. Many students who are removed from school may never return to a classroom — and what is probably the last best chance many of these young people will have for a positive future is thrown away.

Policymakers must be honest in admitting that expulsion does not solve the problem of youth violence. Expulsion only shifts the problem away from the classroom to neighborhoods, and frequently to the streets near schools. An expelled child becomes a problem for parents, a potential problem for the larger community, and all too often for police and the juvenile justice system.

Parents and students have every right to expect that school will be havens of safety for their children in a very violent world. That cannot occur without a serious and significant response to the problem. While it is important that violent and aggressive youth be removed from their school situation so safety prevails for students and staff, we must also be careful not to create "throw away kids." Schools must always be the last bastion of hope for children.

Recognizing that the cost of incarcerating a young person in New Jersey is $28,000 per year, it is substantially better, on financial grounds alone, to educate that child, provide him with job and socialization skills than it is to allow him/her to become a more skillful criminal and greater threat to society. Therefore we must address both the needs of the general population as well as the needs of the violent student. Otherwise the problem will manifest itself in a different venue — Main Street, USA rather than in the schools.

People who are uninformed or simply looking for notoriety may offer a simplistic recommendation -- swift and permanent removal of violent students from school will result in a satisfactory solution. It will not! To the contrary, many of the problems that schools have are from those students who have been expelled or suspended trying to reenter the school itself.

Too often schools do not take a proactive position to preventing violence and vandalism, fearing that utilization of police or security personnel will reflect poorly on the school. Instead it should demonstrate to parents and students that the school authorities have genuine concern and care for their safety and have taken steps to prevent one of the numerous problems...from happening in their high school.

The Report of the New Jersey Department of Education Violence and Vandalism Prevention Task Force

Today policymakers and administrators at all levels are under tremendous pressure to rid the schools of young people whose behavior has been disruptive. It is important to remember, however, that students are not only expelled for bringing a gun to school. Young people can be removed from school for an array of behaviors, dependant upon state and local policy. State boards of education should take steps to ensure that expulsion is neither used needlessly nor discriminantly against children in their state. Boards should also advocate for local flexibility and discretion so that decisions to expel can be made on a case by case basis. Finally, if expulsion is statutorily mandated, state boards should argue for funding to accompany the mandate so that alternative education can be made available for students expelled under the law.

Alternatives to Expulsion

The Study Group challenges education leaders to send a positive message to students perceived to be violent or disruptive: that they will be held accountable for their behavior, that they are going to be educated, and that they are valued. As visionary leaders, state boards of education and state education agencies should develop alternatives to expulsion that, to the greatest degree possible, can be carried out within the regular school setting. Some alternative consequences that, depending on the severity of the behavior, can be used in place of expulsion include the following:

- in-school suspension;
- school service projects;

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- community service programs;
- home instruction;
- evening and weekend academics; and
- counseling programs.

These are just a few examples of how children who have been in trouble can be disciplined without being expelled. Yet more creative alternatives are clearly needed, and the Study Group emphasizes that policymakers and administrators must be allowed sufficient discretion so that appropriate sanctions can be designed that are effective responses to the behavior in question. Lacking viable alternatives, students will either be removed from the school or continue to agitate and frustrate their teachers and classmates. Indeed, nearly half of the teachers responding to a survey released by the National Center for Education Statistics in 1991 indicated that their ability to manage a classroom was impeded by a lack of alternative programs for disorderly students. Thirty-five percent of public school principals responding to a similar survey in 1992 said that a lack of alternatives impacted their ability to sustain a disciplined environment.

In developing alternative programs, efforts should be made to ensure that the punishment fits the behavior, and that this connection is understood by the student in question. In addition, to be effective alternatives to expulsion should:

- take little or no time away from instruction;

Recommendation 5: School systems should provide high quality alternative educational programs for violent students who have been suspended from school. The General Assembly should fund alternative programs.

...Because of the expense of alternative educational programs, it is expected that such a placement would constitute the last step in a continuum of services for such students. Placement should be viewed as temporary, with the goal being the return of the student at the appropriate time to the regular school setting. While the format of such alternative educational programs may vary from a small informal program similar to homebound instruction in some systems to more formal school settings in larger systems, the focus must be on providing a strong academic course of study with a therapeutic emphasis. Other service agencies such as Public Health, Mental Health, Social Services, Juvenile Justice, etc., must be an integral part of the team providing this alternative program.

Whatever the cost of alternative education programs, it will pale in comparison to the human cost of further violence or even the annual cost of incarcerating such students later in life. In fact, it is about 10 times as expensive to send a student to training school as it is to educate him in the public school.

During the 1991-92 school year, it is estimated that over 1,300 students were suspended for the remainder of the school year for violent behavior. A quality program which will both teach and treat these students will cost about $3,500 in additional funds beyond current funding levels per student or an annual cost of $4.5 million. Failure to intervene at this level may lead to placement in training school at an annual cost of more than $32,000 per student.

from *Executive Summary Report of the Task Force on School Violence* (North Carolina)

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RESOLUTION

WHEREAS, The State Board of Education and the Juvenile Probation Commission Board recognize that all students should be educated; and

WHEREAS, An education is critical to students having the knowledge and skills necessary to make responsible choices; and

WHEREAS, An education assists students in becoming productive citizens; and

WHEREAS, In the interest of all students' health, safety, general welfare, and the opportunity to benefit from an education, expulsion at times is necessary; and

WHEREAS, Expulsion is a deterrent to students receiving an education and may increase students' vulnerability of becoming involved in juvenile crime; and

WHEREAS, The State Board of Education and the texas Juvenile Probation Commission Board recognize that the community as a whole must accept and share the responsibility for meeting the needs of expelled youth; and

WHEREAS, Alternative educational programs may foster student success through non-traditional approaches; therefore, be it

RESOLVED, That the State Board of Education and the Juvenile Probation Commission Board advocate for the creation of alternative educational programs for students that have been expelled from school; and, be it further

RESOLVED, That the State Board of Education and the Texas Juvenile Probation Commission Board request the 74th Texas Legislature to appropriate adequate funding for alternative educational programs for expelled students; and, be it further

RESOLVED, That any funds available for alternative educational programs for expelled students be allocated on the basis of documented broad community support, multi-district collaborative efforts, and commitments from other appropriate public agencies to share responsibility for needed services.

Texas State Board of Education

Texas Juvenile Probation Commission Board

- provide counseling or other psychosocial services, as needed;
- teach conflict resolution and other problem-solving skills;
- maintain high standards for learning and behavior;
- accommodate various learning styles in an effort to work with all children and youth, as well as redirect their energies;
- be appropriately supervised; and
- engage family members in seeking a solution.

Under some circumstances, a student's behavior may warrant his or her removal from school. In such cases, schools are obliged to take whatever steps are necessary to ensure the safety and security of all students and staff. It is essential, however, that alternative placements be available for children

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Securing the School Building

A variety of strategies, ranging from closed campuses to dress codes to high-tech communications devices, are being employed around the country to ensure the safety of students and school personnel while they are at school. Issues to be considered when discussing any security measure include the cost of implementation, the effectiveness of the proposed change, and the impact that the measure will have on the overall ambiance of the school. The following paragraphs describe a number of approaches that have been taken to prevent societal violence from spreading into classrooms, hallways, and cafeterias.

Security Personnel — Many districts have taken steps to augment the presence of adults on campuses by both increasing the visibility of school personnel and assigning security staff to schools. In some jurisdictions, police officers have been designated to patrol schools, while other districts have hired their own security staff. In any case, efforts should be taken to ensure that school security personnel have been trained to interact with children and youth and that they are fully integrated into the school community.

Metal Detectors — Debate on the use of stationary and hand-held metal detectors continues as schools around the nation wrestle with sensitive security issues related to how to keep weapons out of school while at the same time maintaining a pleasant learning environment rather than a fortress mentality. On the plus side, metal detectors may increase campus security by locating weapons before they can be brought into school. Unfortunately, while such instruments may reduce the presence of weapons inside schools, they do little to stem violence in general. The results of a 1992 survey of New York City high school students conducted by the CDC indicate that metal detector programs may prevent teens from bringing weapons into schools, but they do not lessen the amount of youth violence or weapon-carrying taking place outside of school. Respondents attending schools where security officers randomly scanned incoming students with hand-held metal detectors were less likely than students at high schools without metal detectors to report having carried a weapons inside school and on their way to and from school, but just as likely to report carrying a weapon outside of school.

Building Design — Barricades, fences, and other physical barriers have been constructed around some schools in an effort to control access to the building as well as to separate the school building from its surrounding neighborhood. In its report *Violence in Schools: How America's School Boards Are Safeguarding Your Children*, the National School Boards Association reports that an Arizona district built fences along campus borders after one school experienced a drive-by shooting.

Communications and Technology — A communications system that links classrooms with the school's central office, or with the authorities in case of an emergency, may be designed to increase safety within classrooms. Telephones and/or alarms may lead teachers, in particular, to feel more secure in their classrooms, which may be located a good distance away from the school's central office. Video cameras can also be placed in schools as surveillance tools and as deterrents to disruptive behavior.

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and youth removed from their school. Developmentally appropriate instruction should not be interrupted.

Many districts have alternative placements available for students who are suspended or expelled from public schools. Generally, alternative schools are designed to serve students who are either at risk of dropping out of their regular school or have trouble learning in a conventional classroom. Traditionally, students who have had difficulties in school that may or may not be related to discipline have enrolled in alternative programs. School systems around the country, however, are having to create more alternative schools in order to handle the numbers of students who are suspended or expelled because of discipline problems.

State boards of education need to monitor the expansion of alternative schools for a number of reasons. First and foremost, steps should be taken to ensure that these settings do not operate simply as schools for so-called "bad kids." The stigma attached to students assigned to a reform-type school is potentially harmful, and puts the future of these students in even more jeopardy. Furthermore, the availability of alternative schools should not be allowed to give rise to more expulsions and referrals. In the spirit of inclusion, efforts should always be made to educate children with discipline problems in their regular school. Finally, education leaders must ensure that the removal of a child from a classroom is never based on race or disability, or used to suppress civil rights in any way.

The ultimate goal of alternative placements should be to return students to their home school. Therefore, in order to prepare students for re-entry into the regular classroom, as well as for their lives after graduation, alternative programs should provide all students with:

- high-quality academics;
- a disciplined environment that enforces high standards of behavior;
- quality counseling and other support services, as needed;
- conflict resolution, mediation, negotiation, and other non-violent problem-solving skills;
- individualized intervention and small-group instruction;
- guidance and goal setting, to prepare students for the next stage in their lives; and
- a personalized environment that accommodates various styles of learning.

Depending on the students they serve, alternative schools may also provide the following services:

- career counseling;
- opportunities for job training;
- counseling for drug or alcohol abuse; and
- flexible scheduling for older students.

State board policies should extend to public alternative schools and the students who attend them. Alternative programs should be monitored as part of the board's accreditation and program review processes.

School Safety Policies

Policies on discipline and the possession of alcohol, drugs, and weapons have been developed by most school districts. Other policies related to violence in school govern the use of suspension and expulsion, referrals to alternative programs, and a plan of action to be put in motion in the event of a threatening situation. Such policies, as well as codes of student conduct and policies related to sexual, racial, and religious harassment, should be made clear to all students and staff. All codes of conduct, moreover, should make clear the range of sanctions that will be imposed for various violations. Students, parents, and staff should be made aware of what is expected of them as well as what will happen in the event that a rule is broken. Discipline policies should also outline due process procedures and set forth an appeals process for those charged with infractions, so that students and their parents are aware of their rights as well as their responsibilities under the school's policies.

Parents, teachers, and students should be included in the development of such policies. All policies should reflect the constitutional rights of students and staff, including their right to due process. In order to be effective deterrents to misbehavior, moreover, policies must be consistent with federal, state, and local laws and guarantee fairness towards everyone.

Checklist for Action

- ✓ **State policymakers should assess the quality of alternative education programs as part of their monitoring function.**
- ✓ **State and local policymakers should assure that rules, regulations, rewards, and recognition are made clear to students and staff as well as applied consistently.**
- ✓ **State Boards should promote the inclusion of mediation, crisis intervention, and classroom management skills in teacher training and staff training and development programs.**

V. Preventing Violence: The School Environment and Curriculum

State plans should include long-term strategies to prevent violence that incorporate a focus on the climate and culture of the school; cross-disciplinary instruction about violence, conflict resolution, and ethics; and intervention programs such as peer mediation, mentoring, and counseling services.

Without a doubt, young people who behave violently either inside or outside of school should be held accountable for their behavior. Fair and consistent discipline, imposed by both schools and the juvenile justice system, is essential to deter children and youth from engaging in violence. Punishment and deterrence, however, are only part of the solution. The Study Group believes that schools and their surrounding communities must simultaneously take action on another front in order to effectively reduce violence for the long term — that of prevention.

A preventive approach to violence among youth involves recognizing, understanding, and modifying the wide array of risk and protective factors that influence young people and their propensity to resort to violence. Broad-based community prevention efforts, therefore, might include attempts to provide jobs in the community, strengthen families, rehabilitate abusers of alcohol and drugs, influence the portrayal of violence by various media, support victims of violence, and improve schooling.

Because factors that may lead to violent behavior can affect children at an early age, it is important that prevention and intervention efforts reach even the very young. Public schools, serving over forty-two million children every day, are therefore natural agents (along with parents, families, and religious and other social institutions) for community change.

While many state policymaking bodies have made serious efforts to reduce violence among young people, the reality is that most violence prevention through education is implemented at the district or school building level. Today, many schools are facing this problem head on. They have used such long-term prevention strategies as restructuring efforts to change the culture of the school; cross-disciplinary instruction about violence, conflict, and social competencies; and anti-violence programs such as peer mediation, mentoring, and counseling services. However, such strategies are not always comprehensive or sustained. **Key to successful prevention is that classroom-based initiatives should be carried out as part of a school-wide effort, which in turn should be implemented in conjunction with community interventions aimed at the family, the neighborhood, and the local economy**. Only a community-wide, comprehensive approach to the prevention of violence can create an environment in which children and youth can put their resolution and mediation skills to good use when they are outside of school.

Restructuring Schools to Prevent Violence

Education is a powerful tool for preventing societal violence. Schools that provide a safe and supportive atmosphere where students are engaged in meaningful learning can provide children with the promise of a meaningful and fulfilling future. Good schools and teachers can help mitigate the feelings of hopelessness typical of violence or poverty-ridden neighborhoods or dysfunctional families — conditions frequently associated with violent and disruptive behavior in young people. The Study Group believes that such schools:

- foster a caring atmosphere that promotes positive attitudes and relationships among students and staff;
- make policies and plans clear to students, parents, school personnel, and the surrounding community;
- encourage the involvement of parents, families, and others in the community;
- make counseling and other health services available as needed;
- provide high quality career counseling and school-to-work programs;
- hold all students to high standards for learning and behavior, without making distinctions between supposedly high and low achievers; and
- enforce rules and regulations consistently and fairly.

An Innovative Approach to Developing School Leaders: The Indiana Principal Leadership Academy

Responding to calls for more intensive professional development opportunities for public school principals, the Indiana General Assembly in 1986 appropriated funds to develop the Indiana Principal Leadership Academy (IPLA). What is unique about the IPLA is that it provides much more than short-term professional development. Indiana principals participating in the program commit themselves to undergoing extensive training during 18 days of inservice over the course of two years. Instruction centers on a number of topics related to leadership skills, effective communication, school climate, and school programs. Using a mixture of reading, lectures, group work, and field experiences, academy sessions are designed to empower principals by providing them with the skills they need to be effective managers as well as leaders of school change.

Some researchers believe that certain aspects of a school's organization and climate can influence the incidence of violent and other disruptive behavior within schools. For example, smaller schools (or schools within schools) can better foster the supportive relationships and increased communications among students and staff that can lead to personal growth, a supportive school climate, a reduction of tensions, and other means of helping students resolve conflict in nonviolent ways. Team teaching, where several teachers are assigned to the same group of students over a number of months or years, may also help nurture meaningful relationships between students and their teachers. On the other hand, the practice of academic tracking may lower the self-esteem of students identified as low achievers, leading in turn to a sense of hopelessness in place of a commitment to learning.

Another feature of school climate and organization that can affect safety is the overall mission of the school. The importance of making policies and regulations clear to students and staff was outlined in the previous chapter. The mission of a school, however, is more than just its discipline code. The mission should include goals for students and staff, as well as statements about the value of young people, the importance of learning, and the promise of an educated life. In essence, the mission is a statement about the culture and direction of the school, much like the mission statements developed by the state board of education or by corporations. The mission statement, posted for all to see and taken to heart by staff, can increase cohesiveness in the school setting and strengthen the focus on learning, thereby reducing discipline problems.

The Study Group believes that a restructured school should operate as a community within the larger community. A vital relationship between the school and the larger community can strengthen the link between education and life outside the school and increase the likelihood that lessons and behavior learned in one environment will transfer to the other. In addition, a community school would remain open after regular hours and on weekends so that children have a safe place to participate in

activities that are healthy, constructive, fun, and supervised. It is paramount that prevention efforts provide young people with safe alternatives to trouble. Schools can play a vital role in doing so.

Finally, **effective leadership is essential to creating a supportive, safe, and secure school climate**. Many principals have literally transformed schools barraged by delinquency into safe and disciplined havens focused on achievement. It is important that state boards support efforts to recruit and develop effective school leaders -- visionary principals who are strong, yet caring; who are in touch with and available to teachers, students, and parents; and who are often seen in the hallways, classrooms, and on playgrounds.

Violence Prevention Curricula

Intervention strategies implemented at the classroom level in the form of curricula and instruction are also central to the ability of a school to prevent violence. State boards of education have broad authority over curriculum guidelines and instructional practices. Indeed, curriculum reform is often a centerpiece of statewide reform efforts. State boards, therefore, can promote the development of program designs, curriculum guidelines, and instructional and assessment tools that emphasize the kind of problem-solving and decision-making skills that children need to lead a life free of violence.

The prevention of violence through education should not be limited to schools that are currently having problems with conflict and discipline. The Study Group believes that all schools should provide young people with the skills that they need to understand and manage conflict, to communicate and negotiate, to make healthy decisions, and to resolve problems without resorting to violence. Furthermore, the Study Group believes that schools should play an important role in building character among young people by fostering values that provide alternatives to violence.

Today many schools across the nation have turned to violence prevention intervention programs to deter children and youth from resorting to violence both inside and outside of school. As with other prevention efforts, there is not enough research available on such programs that tells us whether or not they actually alter behavior for the long term. Longitudinal evaluations of many programs probably won't be available for several years. However, many such programs, when implemented along with other interventions, appear promising, particularly when they are:

- developmentally and culturally relevant;
- woven into the entire fabric of the school, rather than just added on to the curriculum;
- implemented at all grade levels;
- part of a comprehensive school and community-wide prevention effort; and
- implemented consistently over time.

A common approach to school-based violence prevention has been the addition of conflict resolution to curricula and instruction. Conflict resolution education teaches students of all ages how to understand, cope with, and resolve conflict non-violently; how to effectively manage anger or frustration; and how to control their behavior. Through instruction, group work, and role play, students may be asked to solve a problem through listening, negotiation, and compromise. Attention is focused on the causes and consequences of conflict, and how it can be settled non-violently. Another intervention strategy often implemented with conflict resolution is mediation, whereby teachers, parents, or students are trained to be mediators in real-life conflicts at school.

Some states now require a separate conflict resolution course, while others teach skills for settling disputes across more than one discipline. In social studies, for example, students can learn about past conflicts as well as our history of societal violence. The Study Group believes strongly that such lessons should accurately depict past and present events. Discussion of war, for example, should neither glorify violence nor minimize its consequences.

The Resolving Conflict Creatively Program

One violence prevention program that aims to create a culture of nonviolence throughout the entire school is the Resolving Conflict Creatively Program (RCCP). Begun in 1985 in New York City public schools, this K-12 program, jointly sponsored by Educators for Social Responsibility-Metro, is now being implemented in 250 schools in 5 districts nationwide: New York City Public Schools; Anchorage School District; New Orleans Public Schools; Vista Unified School District in California; and the South-Orange Maplewood School District in New Jersey.

While many conflict resolution programs include only a curriculum component, RCCP takes a comprehensive approach to the prevention of violence. In addition to curriculum, RCCP focuses on how to create a school climate that is both caring and supportive of students and staff. Parent, student, and staff involvement are central to the RCCP philosophy. Included in the model are a number of components, including the following:

- ***A Curriculum Component:*** Elementary, secondary, and special education curricula, focusing on violence prevention, conflict resolution, and multiculturalism have been developed by RCCP. Through role play, group work, and other instructional techniques, RCCP curricula develop conflict resolution skills in young people, helping them to communicate, cooperate, negotiate, and solve their problems peacefully. RCCP also educates children and youth in intercultural understanding. Lessons in multiculturalism focus on "bias awareness" and how to counter bias.

- ***A Training Component:*** Teachers and administrators are thoroughly trained by RCCP staff before they begin implementing the program. The intense staff development component covers the nature of conflict as well as conflict resolution, plus instructional approaches such as role play and cooperative learning. RCCP instructors also prepare classroom teachers to integrate conflict resolution skills across a variety of curricula. Finally, RCCP provides follow-up assistance and support to teachers by assigning an RCCP staff member to them who visits their classrooms several times a year.

- ***A Mediation Component:*** Students are trained to be peer mediators in some schools that have been implementing RCCP for over a year, so that faculty familiar with the program are available to support and coordinate the student mediation program. Students who have undergone three days of intense training are then available to mediate disputes among their peers.

- ***A Parent Component:*** In an effort to encourage students to employ conflict resolution skills outside of school, a growing number of RCCP schools are implementing a parent involvement program. Parents are then trained to teach other parents about handling conflict.

Source: William DeJong, Ph.D. *Learning Peace: The Resolving Conflict Creatively Program in the New York City Public Schools.*

Some critics of conflict resolution fear a "solution of the month" mentality among policymakers and administrators: after a program is quickly selected, they may too easily feel that the problem is solved, case closed. As noted earlier, attention must be paid to a number of factors associated with violence among young people — the underlying causes, the effects, the patterns of violence in a particular school or community. In addition, it is clear that more long-term evaluative data is needed before sweeping conclusions can be made about the impact of the assortment of conflict resolution programs that are currently being marketed. Critics also warn that much of the research showing that programs have led to positive change in students are based on surveys of teachers and students. While such results appear promising, many researchers are calling for more in-depth evaluation. Lastly, some experts warn that the resolution, mediation, and problem-solving skills that are cultivated in students may not, in fact, affect their behavior outside of school, particularly if they are repeatedly exposed to violent attitudes and behaviors in their homes, in their neighborhoods, and on their televisions. However, some programs, including the Resolving Conflict Creatively Program that is featured on page 28, have taken a comprehensive approach that aims to extend its influence on behavior beyond the classroom.

In the final analysis policymakers and educators must analyze the problems in their own state, become familiar with the science of behavior, weigh the available evidence concerning prevention programs -- and then take their "best shot" in choosing which programs will be the most effective. While serious evaluations should be supported, given the urgency of the current situation, we cannot afford to wait for the results of long-term research. Too many young lives are at stake right now.

Character Education

Like conflict resolution, character education can either be taught as a separate course or infused into various curricula. Character education might include lessons about values that promote democracy, pluralism, and responsibility to the community, thereby guiding the development of young people into conscientious citizens. Instruction might also include a discussion of values that are harmonious with the non-violent resolution of conflict. Finally, character education can teach students about their rights and responsibilities before the law and help them think about the consequences of their behavior from a larger societal context.

> We recognize that the foundation of our free and democratic society is a populace educated to respect sound values and make intelligent decisions through open discussion and the exchange of ideas. It follows, therefore, that the schools, working with the home, religious institutions, government, business and industry, and community organizations, must actively reinforce basic, clearly identified values. In that way, present and future generations will develop the character, acquire the knowledge, and possess the wisdom needed to function in society.
>
> *Character Education in Ohio: Sample Strategies*,
> Ohio Department of Education

Oftentimes, character education is depicted as the indoctrination of values that may or may not be compatible with one's self, family, or culture. By no means does this report endorse such a scheme. The Study Group feels, however, that it is important for schools to reinforce some of the values that are common to society, such as responsibility, honesty, and respect, through setting examples for young people as well as through quality education.

Conflict resolution, mediation, and character education are just a few of the many educational interventions that are practiced in elementary,

middle, and high schools across the country. Other classroom-based programs designed to prevent violence teach children and youth the following:

- social and emotional competencies;
- crime prevention;
- law-related education, to foster knowledge of and respect for the law;
- violence avoidance;
- education about firearms; and
- media literacy.

Still other interventions target specific populations of students, such as young people who have witnessed violent events; gang or potential gang members; or children who have been abused or neglected.

Again, such interventions should be supplemented by other efforts so that the approach is broad-based. A comprehensive prevention program made up of layers of interventions and linked to community efforts is essential if children are to use the knowledge and skills that they learn inside school out in their neighborhoods, in their homes, and in their future lives.

Violence Prevention and Comprehensive School Health Programs

Public health experts agree that most major health problems are caused by: drug, alcohol, and tobacco use; behaviors that cause injury, **including violence**; inadequate physical activity; inadequate diet; and sexual practices that result in diseases such as HIV/AIDS and/or unwanted pregnancies.

All these behaviors share some characteristics. All are established during childhood and early adolescence. Indeed, the CDC 1991 Youth Risk Behavior Survey reported that 26 percent of the high school students surveyed had carried a weapon within a month from the survey; 42 percent had been in a physical fight; 82 percent had ever drank alcohol; and up to 31 percent had ever used marijuana or other drugs. Furthermore, all these behaviors are interrelated; all affect educational achievement; and all are preventable.

A comprehensive school health program can influence these behaviors in an integrated way. Education and skills development in one area reinforces other topics, and learning builds year by year. When taught sequentially by well trained staff, a comprehensive school health program helps children and adolescents learn the skills they need for healthy and productive lives. These skills include:

- communication and negotiation skills needed to handle peer pressure;
- making decisions that are well-informed and consider consequences;
- taking responsibility for one's health and actions;
- respecting one's self and others;
- thinking critically about media messages;
- handling stress in positive ways;
- understanding and expressing feelings in non-harmful ways; and
- participating in community activities.

These skills are essential for preventing violence, substance abuse and other health problems, just as reading and writing skills are essential in science, math, and history. Learning to apply health promotion skills to a range of personal behaviors at an early age strengthens students' ability to avoid violence and become better citizens along the way.

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Checklist for Action

- ✓ **State boards of education should explore ways to collaborate with other stakeholders to foster opportunities for present and future employment as well as safe and healthy after-school activities.**
- ✓ **State boards should encourage each school to have a comprehensive plan in place that promotes positive, safe and supportive school environments.**
- ✓ **State boards of education should take steps to include conflict resolution as well as character education in curricular frameworks.**
- ✓ **State boards should promote the inclusion of conflict resolution, multiculturalism, and the impact of violence on learning and behavior in teacher training and staff training and develop ment programs.**

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The views expressed in this report do not necessarily coincide with the views of the consultants listed above.

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